

fully now, that there isn't any hope of our ever doing so? Ah, there it is!"

He had loosened her hands from his coat, and turning from her began to walk up and down the floor, while she sank down rather hopelessly and helplessly into her chair.

"You'd forgive my early-Victorian, eve-of-the-wedding tremors, wouldn't you?" she said. "But you don't understand me when I try in—in every way I can think of to—secure our happiness."

"It seems to me that you are rather bent on securing our possible unhappiness," he said grimly. "One might imagine that you could have put in the time more agreeably in considering the—or what was to me, at least, the immense happiness that lies, or has seemed to lie, before us. Look here, Page, I am still trying to think that this is just a matter of nerves, of fatigued nerves on your part; but I must confess that you are beginning rather ruthlessly to shatter my illusions."

Restraint was evidently hard for him now. His face had grown tense, and the snap of his eyes was more noticeable, more steel-like.

"Frankly, I'm beginning to doubt whether you care a straw about me, and I don't want," there was a passionate emphasis in his voice now, "I don't want to face such a possibility. I doubt very much if any girl who really loves a man could indulge in such morbid anticipations and cold-blooded calculations."

"How do you know how a girl would feel?" her voice was very low, very tremulous.

"I can only judge by myself how any human being, girl or man, would feel in the circumstances. I know how I feel, how I have felt from the first, and you are the only woman in the world for me. I am considerably older than you. I happen to be rather an analytical sort of person, and I'm certainly not willing to jeopardize my whole life's happiness. But I've been so sure, Page, I've been so sure, and it seems to me that if there was any real love in your heart for me you'd be just as sure; so sure, in fact, that these foolish stipulations you've been making never could have entered your head. This marriage is a sacrament to me. Why, Page—"

BUT before he could go on there was a subdued, silken rustle at the door, and a tired but determinedly gay voice announced:

"I know you both hate the sight of me; but I'm a stern officer of the law, and if the bride is to look her loveliest at twelve o'clock tomorrow morning, she simply has to go to bed now."

The world, their particular world, looked from Mrs. Amberley to Page, and half of it said:

"I wonder if the daughter will ever be one-third as attractive as the mother?"

The other half decided, "The girl must have inherited her character and distinction of appearance from her father."

Mrs. Amberley was a woman of many and charming assumptions. She was small, dark, and graceful, her hair touched lightly and becomingly with gray, and she had acquired a finish of both appearance and manner that did credit to her appreciation of herself. No woman wore her clothes or her jewels to better advantage: ever using simplicity as a sort of veil to soften and obscure a too obvious gorgeousness. In tableaux for charity she invariably appeared as Cinderella. It was deliciously piquant to see one so dowered by fortune posing as a beggar maid, and then too her feet were faultlessly shaped and incredibly small.

As to her assumptions, she assumed that she was charming with such one-idea conviction that the world found her so. She assumed that she was clever, and it conceded that also, although not so enthusiastically. She assumed happiness, and it wondered and murmured how beautifully she had borne it. Mrs. Amberley was, to say the least—

"There's probably not going to be any wedding tomorrow, Mother," said the girl tonelessly.

Mrs. Amberley lifted her eyebrows and

looked significantly at Dean. She was evidently not appalled by the statement. She came nearer and laid her small, heavily ringed hand on her daughter's shoulder. "My dearest child," she said soothingly, "you're dead tired—and no wonder! Come, run away to bed at once. Remember, you must walk up the church aisle looking like a rose tomorrow."

Page twitched her shoulder away. She did not lift her brooding face. "But, Mother, I mean what I say. I've been begging Stanley to meet me on a basis of some kind of understanding. Oh, it seems to me that it isn't love I want, so much as sincerity; the feeling that I could go to him with every thought, every idea, that came into my mind, and that he'd understand. Oh, let me finish, Stanley!" as Dean interrupted her. She spoke to him now instead of to her mother. "Tonight, when I tried to make it clear to you, you didn't understand, you simply didn't see what I was driving at. Oh, I don't want you to agree with me; it isn't that, but to understand. And now I feel that you don't, and I can't—I can't go on with this wedding."

Mrs. Amberley shot a glance of worried consternation at Dean, and knelt down beside her daughter, her blue and silver chiffons trailing on the floor. She tried to draw the girl's head to her shoulder; but Page turned away from her.

"I know I'm tired," she said; "but that isn't it. When I spoke to Stanley tonight, when I told him what was in my heart, I saw the mask come over his face, that mask that I have seen on your face a thousand times whenever I've tried to speak of any real things, Mother. But it's a real world. People live and love and suffer and die in it, and yet all my life has been lived by the standards of pretense, and tomorrow—I am to be married by them. Tomorrow you'll manage to convey the impression to everybody that I'm the traditional, blushing bride, with all her illusions intact, and possessing all that stupid and unnecessary ignorance that you will call 'my little girl's beautiful innocence,' as if I were incapable of even suspecting that anything could ever dim the romance of the present—and—and you'll make them believe it too!"

"You will presently make Stanley believe that you are a person of impossible disposition," said her mother in dry comment.

"If I am, isn't it better for him to know it beforehand, while there is still time for him to escape?"

Mrs. Amberley shrugged her shoulders slightly, lifting her brows with a faint, protesting smile at Dean.

"But, Mother—" and now Page turned and nestled against her mother's shoulder. The tears were running down her cheeks, and she made no effort to wipe them away. Her face, with her dark hair tumbling about it, looked extraordinarily small and quivering and childish. "Mother, I'm frightened. I told Stanley so, and—he wouldn't understand. No, Stanley," as again he tried to interrupt her, "wait. I can't go on pretending that everything in life is different from what it really is. It smothered me. It always has smothered me, and I've always been dashing myself against—oh, not against a stone wall,—but a soft, unyielding featherbed. And now it seems to me from the way you have taken what I had to say to you that if I married you tomorrow, I should have to go on on that basis, as if my married life would be built on and include all—all of those things that I have most longed to escape."

"What is she talking about?" Mrs. Amberley besought Dean helplessly. Then she spoke to her daughter, patiently still, but with a worried irritation which was beginning to show, not only on her face but in her voice. "What things in your beautiful, sheltered life could you possibly want to escape, Page? She has ideas, you know," she spoke to Dean again, disclaiming all responsibility for them in another little shrug of her white shoulders which set all her diamonds twinkling. "She would go to college! She got them there, I dare say."

"Oh, Mother, what's the use?" Page threw both hands out with a passionate, protesting gesture. "You might as well understand that I know the meaning of those two anonymous presents that arrived today."

MRS. AMBERLEY drew her arm from her daughter's shoulder, and leaning away from her looked at her with dismayed and frowning incredulity. "What have you been hearing? Who—who has told you anything? Who has dared—" There was a sudden harsh note in her voice which suggested some strength of nature, some depth of emotion, which her pretty frivolity, her careful conventionality, forever denied; but before she let herself say more she glanced quickly at Dean, biting her lip as she did so, and then added more quietly, "I ordered that pendant sent back at once before you saw it."

"And when I saw it I gave a different order."

There was a moment of mute struggle between the mother and the daughter, a flaming, as it were, into momentary life of an old, old struggle, an undying, repressed resentment; but it flickered and faded first in the mother's eyes. The daughter was the stronger nature.

The girl stepped over to one of the tables and opening a case lifted from it a beautiful pearl and diamond pendant. "You had no right to order it returned, Mother. It was sent to me, an absolutely personal present to me. You have no share in it, Stanley; it is all mine." With nervous fingers she fastened the slender chain from which it hung about her neck.

"Page," cried her mother sharply, "take it off, take it off this moment!" She pressed her handkerchief to her mouth; her eyes flashed angrily. "How dared she send you a present? Here," picking up the case, "shut it up in this at once, and I will see that it is sent back tomorrow."

Again there was that mute but definite struggle between the two women, and again it was the daughter who triumphed.

"I'm not going to take it off," she said. "I'm going

to keep it. It is a lovely thing. What a lot of time and thought she has spent in selecting a present for me! She must have cared very much for my father."

"Page!" Her mother's voice interrupted her harshly, while she stole a frightened glance at Dean. "How do you—how could you possibly know anything of that old, forgotten affair?"

"Oh, Mother, must I remind you that I am not of your generation? How could I fail to know such a secret? People whisper still that you and Father couldn't agree, and that you were living unhappily when he fell in love with your best friend, a widow. They parted, and everyone says that is the reason she lives in Europe, and they also say that it was only after that—that my father began to—well, drink so heavily."

"My dear Page," Dean's voice broke in coolly, "if you were not so much excited, I am sure that you would be the first to notice that your remarks are in poor taste; and don't you think that you are also being rather needlessly unkind to your mother?"

"I am not being needlessly cruel to my mother," she said. "It is simply that she and I have come to a point in life where some of our pharisaical conventions have got to fall to the ground by their own weight. There's something real among the three of us here tonight, something that we've all been pushing out of sight and shutting up in dark closets; but it's got to be brought out to the light now, some way or other. I feel that it is out of our hands now, and I don't care how Mother looks at me, Stanley, nor what you say. What is vital in human relations is never in bad taste."

She walked swiftly over to another table and took from it a beautiful bowl.

"This too was sent anonymously; but you knew, Mother, you knew the moment you saw it from whom it came, and your face changed and softened. Your eyes filled with tears, and you said involuntarily and under your breath, 'How sweet of him!' And for once you were not just the stunning Mrs. Amberley: You looked like a woman who could love and suffer. And all day you've been going about with that soft, little dream in your eyes. Mother, this is your present, not mine. I shall keep this," her fingers closed over the pendant at her throat, "and I shall wear it. This belongs to me; but I shall never take the potpourri jar from you. It," her voice trembled, "is filled with ashes of roses—old, sweet memories—yours, Mother!"

MRS. AMBERLEY had turned about in her chair so that her face was hidden from both of the others. She still pressed her handkerchief to her mouth, and there was something in her attitude which showed that she shrank from and resented her daughter's undesired intrusion into her past which was, to her, both secret and sacred.

"Don't!" she cried sharply. "You have no right! Oh, I realize now as I have never done before that there is no real sympathy, no understanding, between you and me! There never has been. But that this should have come to me now, after all my sacrifices!"

"Sacrifices!" cried the girl, and stood arrested, gazing at her mother strangely.

"Yes, sacrifices that you can never dream of." For the first time in many years Mrs. Amberley surrendered herself to her feelings. Involuntarily, unconsciously, she discarded her charming poses, her graceful assumptions, and the long buried, real woman revealed itself in her eyes and spoke in her vibrant voice.

"Do you suppose," she went on, "that if it had not been for you I should ever have consented to live under the same roof with your father? Why, when you were only a baby we saw definitely and forever that all hope of happiness between us was over, and we had decided upon a divorce. Even the papers were drawn up, and then our friends—our families—pointed out what we were almost forgetting,—you, the child. We saw, both of us, that we had to be fair to you. You hadn't asked

Continued on page 16



"Can't—this is as far as I go!"